

Cornish Ports and Harbours

Assessing heritage significance, threats, protection and opportunities (6306)

Summary of method and results

Introduction

Ports and harbours, in Cornwall, Scilly and elsewhere in England make a major contribution to local character and distinctiveness, forming significant landscape features and reflecting the varied history, use and development of maritime settlements, their hinterlands and the sea. They typically include ranges of substantial and varied specialised buildings, structures, equipment, earthworks and spaces. Being at the interface of land and sea (whether that is open or within estuaries), they are, or in some cases were, important hubs that reveal much about both historic and current terrestrial and maritime activities. As the points where individuals and groups occasionally or routinely either cast off into or returned from the uncertain world of the sea, their histories are often unusually colourful. By contrast, today the economic value and importance of ports and harbours is in part currently derived from their contribution to Cornwall and Scilly's tourism industry.

As many ports and harbours are still in active use and so continue to develop and require maintenance in the face of natural and anthropogenic forces for change, they form an especially dynamic part of the coastal historic environment resource.

The Cornish Ports and Harbours project was carried out between 2013 and 2016 by Cornwall Archaeological Unit for Historic England. The project aimed to establish effective methodologies for assessing the fabric, significance and character of English ports and harbours by using a study of those in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly as a pilot. It involved a rapid assessment of the forces for change affecting Cornwall's ports and harbours and their vulnerability or capability to benefit from change, classifying the sites according to a range of variables, undertaking historic characterisation of selected ports and harbours and carrying out limited field work at the selected sites. Outcomes of the project will include a widely disseminated report, a Historic Environment Action Plan (HEAP) for Cornwall and Scilly's ports and harbours, management recommendations and a list of features within ports and harbours which are recommended candidates for designation.

Methodology

The project comprised four clearly defined stages:

Stage 1: Assessment of the whole Cornish and Scillonian ports and harbours resource

Stage 1 involved a rapid review of forces for change, previous work and sources. A long list of 608 Cornish and Scillonian ports and harbours was compiled by consulting the Historic Environment Record (HER) and transformed into an outline classification of sites using a number of variables — types of use, topography, chronology, scale (1-6), key components, current activity levels, associated settlement, and condition. This was then reduced into nine classes: Beach; Civic provision, Commercial, Fishing, Industrial, Leisure, Local trading, Military and Multi-purpose. We tried using a scoring matrix for this but it produced too many variables so we arrived at the classes by prescriptive process of rationalisation.

Models for vulnerability and capacity to benefit from change were produced for each class and their significance assessed based on Historic England's *Conservation Principles* (English Heritage 2008). Those classes most at risk and those most likely to benefit from change were then identified and a long list of potential sites for further study was produced. From this list 15 sites were selected for individual study and an updated project design was prepared for Stage 2.

Stage 2: Assessment of 15 selected ports and harbours

The 15 selected ports and harbours were: Bude, Charlestown, Duckpool, Fowey, Hayle, Higher Town Quay and Old Quay, St Martin's (Scilly), Kilcobben Cove, Lerryn, Newlyn, Penberth Cove, Penzance, Portreath, St Mary's Harbour (Scilly), Truro and Wacker Quay. The Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) attribute table was project-specific but largely based upon the structure of Historic England's Historic Characterisation Thesaurus (FISH 2015) with additional detail taken from the national Historic Seascapes Characterisation (HSC) structure and at Sub-type level, the Thesaurus of Monument Types (FISH 2016). The detail of the Sub-Type level was created to enable more detailed management items to be considered in the reports. Once the HLC structure was agreed the GIS database was set up and the study areas delineated. Characterisation was undertaken of each port/harbour at scale of 1:2,500 to be viewed at the same scale with minimum polygon size of 0.1ha. Three previous time-slices were created for each port, predominantly based on the following sources, where available — 1940s RAF vertical photographs, c1907 2nd Edition OS mapping, c1880 1st Edition OS mapping and c1840 Tithe mapping. Fieldwork was undertaken to identify typical components, identified in a gazetteer, and then the individual reports were produced.

Stage 3: Collation of results and reporting

During this stage the results of Stages 1 and 2 were collated into a report. Stage 3 also included preparation of a PowerPoint presentation and a Historic Environment Action Plan (HEAP) for Cornwall and Scilly's ports and harbours. HEAPs are the equivalent of Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) developed by the natural environment sector. They may be expected to deal with important or specific types of site (cultural equivalents of animal or plant species) and make use of HLC Types in developing strategies to appropriately manage 'cultural habitats' (Clark *et al* 2004, 53).

For the HEAP the assessment of significance, character, threats, opportunities and condition that form important parts of this project will be reviewed to draw out key messages that those with the authority to do so can use when drawing up various forms of policy (as in Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans) and strategy, whether these are related to planning change, conservation or maintenance, guiding the design of change, or taking opportunities to extend or improve presentation of the history, significance and value of ports and harbours.

Much of the Stage 1 and 2 methodology for this project was that required in the preparation of a HEAP. Therefore the preparation of the HEAP was largely a case of collating the work already carried out into a formalised document. The various stages for producing a HEAP are outlined in Clark *et al* 2004.

Stage 4: Securing protection outcomes

When commissioned this project was lodged within Measure 4 of the National Heritage Protection Programme (NHPP) which addressed the identified need to assess the significance and character of aspects of the historic environment that are under threat but whose significance and character are poorly understood. This stage will include preparation of a gazetteer of sites and features which will be reduced to short list of candidates in consultation with HE's Designation Department. From this a formal short list of designation candidates will be prepared with supporting statements.

Following consultation with the Maritime section of Cornwall Council (CC), a series of management recommendations will be drawn up. For sites in CC ownership (and those

which are part of the holdings of the National Trust) the recommendations will be directed towards particular sites and features.

Results

Principal forces for change

Since the project began in 2013 the potential impacts of climate change have become more manifest. The storms during the winter of 2013/14, in particular, caused structural damage to a number of Cornish and Scillonian ports and harbours emphasising that all Cornish ports and harbours as well other sections of the coastline are vulnerable to increased storm surges and extreme weather events.

Average global temperature and sea level have risen since the late 19th century and at an increased rate over the past few decades. Average UK temperature has risen since the mid-20th century, as have average sea level and sea surface temperature around the UK coast. Over the same time period, trends in precipitation and storminess are harder to identify (UK Climate Projections (UKCP09)). Future sea-level rise around the UK is estimated to be between 12 and 76cm by 2090–2099 (Lowe *et al* 2009). This range is based on projections using low, medium and high scenarios for greenhouse gas emissions, and the central estimate for the medium scenario is 37cm by 2100, although this should not be taken as the most likely projection.

There is a determined agenda for social and economic change in Cornwall in line with UK government policy. Many ports and harbours are subject to pressures for new facilities to improve and extend commercial and leisure use, most typically in the form of marinas to service the potential leisure and tourism industry. There are pressures for individual ports and harbours to become financially sustainable under CC management (*cf* Cornwall Maritime Strategy 2012–2030).

Principal anthropogenic forces for change in Cornwall and Scilly include:

- expansion, intensification or change of use;
- changes in method and scale of use, for example shifts of fishing to deep sea trawling, of warehousing to containerisation, of ferries to ro-ro, of small fishing boats to larger ones, etc.;
- changes in function, with numerous examples of switches of ports, harbours and their associated settlements to maritime leisure activities (yachting, swimming, diving, surfing etc.), serving tourism, including much that involves enjoyment of the heritage values of ports and harbours, or primarily non-maritime residential use;
- repair and restoration of elements of complexes; settlement expansion, including onto the 'brownfield' areas of yards, wharves, works, etc.; other forms of successional use of buildings and structures (cellars, warehouses, lifeboat houses, capstan houses, etc.) and spaces;
- developmental responses to climate change (strengthening of structures, placement of material to diffuse the force of waves, etc.);
- reduction or cessation of use leading to neglect, abandonment and dismantlement; and
- local topography, as an indirect force, especially where it allows little or no room for manoeuvre in accommodating structures, etc. as sea levels rise; and dredging of approach channels and interiors of harbours.

Threats and opportunities

Threats consequent on the above forces for change include; physical loss of or damage to significant heritage assets, and incidentally, harbour structures that also serve as *de facto* flood and storm defence structures protecting land and settlements that contain other heritage assets; loss of legibility of history; and change of character and

consequent diminution of distinctiveness and contribution to sense of place and local identity.

There are also opportunities consequent to the anthropogenic forces for change, notably: retaining economic use of failing or redundant structures and processes by thoughtful design of alternative uses; and maintaining viability of local economy and society and thus retaining functionality that ensures or encourages maintenance of assets and processes (the latter including sluicing silt from enclosed harbours).

The Cornwall Maritime Strategy identifies strong roles for landscape and seascape character in building Cornwall's future sustainable economic and community development. The Strategy positively views landscape and seascape as:

- A positive asset for economic development, hugely important in creating distinctiveness of place and an environment in which people choose to live, work and build businesses (Cornwall Council 2012, 23); and
- Relevant to all economic activity and community cohesion in the area, not just an asset for the tourism industry (Cornwall Council 2012, 9).

Recommendations

The results of the project, presented in the report, with its approach exemplified through its Stage 2 reports and the management principles and priorities contained within the project's HEAP, provide key tools for assisting with the management of Cornwall and Scilly's port-related heritage. They can be consulted in relation to port-related planning, both reactive in response to planning applications and proactive in guiding forward management, by Historic England, by the Local Planning Authority (LPA) historic environment planning advice officers (buildings and archaeology) and by many public and private bodies, for example The National Trust, in connection with development or management proposals and to inform and support a number of forward planning initiatives and projects or neighbourhood forums in the preparation of Neighbourhood Development Plans.

The Cornwall Maritime Strategy (Cornwall Council 2102) is a significant driver in shaping the Council's involvement with port heritage, outlining a strategic vision for Maritime Cornwall by 2030:

- Cornwall has a sustainably managed maritime environment, which is well understood and known internationally as an excellent location for work, wildlife and for recreation;
- Cornwall's economy is supported by a diverse range of opportunities for ports, marine-related industries, transport and businesses including environmental technologies;
- Cornwall has a rich and enviable maritime heritage, a healthy maritime natural environment and landscape;
- Cornwall has distinctive, well-connected communities, resilient in the face of change.

Heritage Partnership Agreements (HPAs), whether non-statutory or statutory, will be applicable to only some ports, which should become apparent as the relationship between Historic England, the LPA and the port industry grows. Only a few (non-statutory) HPAs have been implemented to date, thus there is limited best practice to draw from, and there are mixed views on their success. As highlighted in our report, Cornwall Council is currently working on a HPA with the National Trust, using Mullion Harbour as a pilot project with the idea of using it as model for further HPAs for Cornwall Council owned ports and harbours. The first stage of the HPA will be a Conservation Management Plan for the harbour.

Most Cornish ports and harbours would benefit from an adequately-resourced Conservation Management Plan for their port-related heritage. This should include a

vision for each port/harbour along with a set of management policies, in line with the HEAP for Cornwall and Scilly's ports and harbours. These policies should be specific to the needs of each port/harbour and their port-related heritage and the people who value it. The policies should be based on an understanding of each port/harbour and its port-related heritage, how it is valued and its current management issues.

Conservation Areas were first introduced in 1967 through the Civic Amenities Act and to date more than 9000 exist in the UK. The current Act governing the designation of these 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Under this Act local planning authorities are required to designate conservation areas, to keep them under review and if appropriate to designate further areas. Designation remains the principal means by which local authorities can apply conservation policies to a particular area. Current guidance was set out by English Heritage in the 2011 publication 'Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management'. In accordance with guidance issued by Historic England it is good practice to regularly review Conservation Area Appraisals to ensure they remain accurate and up to date.

The outputs of this project can help guide parish councils, town councils or neighbourhood groups in the production of Neighbourhood Development Plans and assist them in forming a view on planning applications. The outputs of this project can also help guide neighbourhood groups in the production of Local Lists or in undertaking local List Surveys, Buildings at Risk Surveys and Condition Surveys. They can also be used to enhance or add to existing information for port-related heritage in the various ports and harbours and to contribute to town trails which celebrate that heritage.

Protection outcomes

To ensure that assessment leads directly to actual protection, projects dealing with thematic subjects, such as this one, should have as a final stage the setting out of reasonable and realistic routes towards increased protection.

A gazetteer long list of sites and features that are candidates was produced for consideration by Historic England's Designation Department. These were either candidates for new designation or features already designated that are proposed for review of extent or grade of protection. In preparing the gazetteer the main focus was on the ports and harbours selected for study in Stage 2. The Gazetteer has been submitted to HE's Designation Department for further consideration in discussion with Cornwall Council

In addition, following production of the HEAP and consultation with the LPA, a series of management recommendations was drawn up.

References

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